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ABSTRACT

Examining the origin and accomplishments of the Lancastrian monitorial system of instruction, this paper discusses the influence of that system on American education. It gives a brief history of how Joseph Lancaster became involved in reading instruction and how he was a pioneer in emphasizing a reading curriculum that was written down. It then describes the monitorial system of instruction and the Lancastrian method of reading instruction. It discusses influences of Lancaster on American education and lists six relevant beliefs in the thinking of Joseph Lancaster that were very progressive for his day. The paper concludes that Lancaster has a relevant place in the history of reading instruction as well as in bringing to the United States his monitorial system of instruction. Listed are 10 trends that are presently used in the teaching of reading. (Contains 15 references.) (SC)

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Joseph Lancaster and the History of Reading Instruction.

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JOSEPH LANCASTER AND THE HISTORY OF READING INSTRUCTION

Many individuals and groups have contributed to developing and improving the reading curriculum. A major purpose of this paper was to examine and the origin and accomplishments of the Lancastrian monitorial system of instruction. A further purpose was to show its influence on American education (See Edwards and Richey, 1947, 1963).

As a young boy, Joseph Lancaster had a strong desire to be a teacher and left home in England, without his parent's knowledge, to teach poor people in Jamaica. To pay for his passage to Jamaica, Lancaster served as a volunteer aboard ship. On board ship, young Lancaster was ridiculed by crew members until he preached a very impressive sermon on the evils of drinking and swearing, after which he was treated respectfully. Later a friend of the Lancaster's furnished money for young Joseph to return home to England. Lancaster's father then provided a room in the home whereby a school for poor children was established. No money was charged for schooling at the beginning. However, many, many children came to attend and fees were charged due to involved expenses; however, the enrollment also went down at this point. Lancaster then thought of a plan of instruction in which large numbers of pupils could be taught in a very inexpensive manner. Approximately five per cent of the total population in the United States could read and reading was considered a luxury too expensive to implement for an increased number of pupils. Cutting costs was of utmost importance if schooling was to be made available for more pupils. Thus, charts along the walls were used for teaching, slates and writing in sand was used instead of paper which was difficult to process and very expensive to buy (Ediger, 1987).

The Free School society was organized in New York city in 1805 and incorporated the Lancastrian monitorial system of instruction. Since the monitorial system of instruction as introduced in 1805 was observed to be very successful, the New York state legislature provided $4,000, a very large amount for its day, to its success to further educational endeavors. In 1826, Maryland set up a state department of education for the Lancastrian system. North Carolina considered implementing a stated department also, but it was never implemented. In 1829, Mexico established Lancastrian schools for Texas. Governor De Witt Clinton of New York praised Lancaster for his excellent work in teaching. He praised the order and discipline of these schools as well as pupils leaning more and better than with any previous plan of instruction. Governor Clinton, who was president of the Free School Society for 23 years, wrote the following:

When I perceive that many boys in our schools have been taught to

read and write in two months, who did not before know the alphabet,

and that one has even accomplished it in three weeks -- when I view all the learnings and tendencies of the system- when I contemplate the habits of order which it forms, the spirit of emulation which it excites, the rapid movement which it produces, the purity of morals which it inculcates, when I behold the extraordinary union of celerity in instruction and economy of expense, and when I perceive one great assembly of one thousand children, under the eye of a single teacher,...I recognize in Lancaster the benefactor of the human race. I consider this system as creating a new era in education as a blessing sent down from heaven to redeem the poor and distressed of this world from the power and domination of ignorance (quoted in Cubberley, 1919, 1934, and 1948, p.134)..

Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) was a pioneer in emphasizing a reading curriculum that was written down. With the codification of his model, interested people in reading instruction could use these writings to make for revisions. Lancaster was born a Quaker which made his ideas more acceptable in the United States as compared to those of the Anglican Church. Andrew Bell, a contemporary of Joseph Lancaster and an Anglican, discovered the Monitorial System of Instruction simultaneously with Lancaster. But the Revolutionary War had been completed with England thus making Lancaster, a Quaker, more acceptable as compared to Bell, an Anglican, in introducing the monitorial plan in the US.

The Monitorial System of Instruction.

Lancaster brought the Monitorial system to the United States in 1805. Here, as many as 1,000 pupils could be taught in a single room in a large building. Most cities at that time were not large enough to have 1,000 pupils in a single building.

A master teacher was in charge of all these pupils in one building. He taught monitors in the early morning, prior to class time, who in return would each teach a benchful of ten boys. Monitors individually were granted much power over their set of ten pupils.They could promote pupils individually to the next class level. Monitors could give rewards, an early example of positive reinforcement, to pupils for doing well. They gave orders to pupils as to when to march to the proper chart on the wall for teaching purposes. With many in a classroom, pupils had to tow the line in following other benchfuls of pupils to relevant charts since no books were availably for teaching purposes. When one benchful of pupils had been taught from a chart, the next group would follow orderly. Each boy in a group had to place his toes on on line before the chart. Discipline was strict! Joseph Lancaster believed physical

punishment, so prevalent in his day, to be cruel and unworthy of use. Instead embarrassing pupils as a means of discipline was used. Thus, a boy could be suspended in a basket from the ceiling or be yoked together with others who misbehaved and be paraded around the room to scornful onlookers.

Monitors at the beginning would work free in teaching pupils, but they did receive a precious commodity which was education, in return. Later on and beginning in 1818, monitors attended teacher training classes before being permitted to teach. They were then paid for their services (See Mulhern,1959, pp. 497,499,595).

Lancastrian Method of Reading Instruction

Joseph Lancaster wrote a book entitled Manuals of Instruction whereby he claimed that anyone who could read and follow the contents in the book might well become a successful monitorial school teacher. Pertaining to Manuals of Instruction, Cubberley (1930, 1948) wrote:

The Manuals of Instruction gave complete directions for the organization and management of monitorial schools, the details of recitation work, use of apparatus, order, position of pupils at their work, and classification being minutely handed down. By carefully studying and following these directions, any reasonably intelligent person could soon learn to become a successful teacher in an monitorial school.

Lancaster's discussion of sequential class levels of pupils in reading are interesting to follow. In class one, pupils would be taught the individual letters of the alphabet. These letters had to be mastered before the monitor would promote pupils individually to class two. Mastery learning was involved here when leanings were specific and could be measured in terms of what had been learned. In class two, pupils would learn syllables, not words, of two letters. Syllables, such as ab, ac, ad, af, and ag, were examples of two letters in a syllable. Mastery learning of these syllables had to be in effect before the monitor would promote individuals to class three. In class three, pupils memorized syllables and words of three letters. I maintain that memorizing syllables of three letters to be very complex and abstract indeed! Syllables such as "baf," "bas," and "baz," serve as examples. Words of three letters might be relatively easy if these related directly to concrete examples and were somewhat consistent between symbol and sound, such as "cat," "bat," "mat," and "sat". Memorization was the method of teaching stressed by Lancaster and thus meaning in learning was not necessarily an objective of instruction. Throughout the different class levels, pupils were taught from charts on the wall, since textbooks were too expensive and not available in the field. Monitors together with the master teacher made the charts and posted them on appropriate

places on walls so that pupils could move in sequence in bench fulls to where the teaching was to occur through memorization. Use of charts made instruction inexpensive. At the beginning of Lancaster's coming to the United States in 1805, instruction was free, but this was changed to charging a fee when the expenses of schooling became too great. However, free or inexpensive education helped bring on the public schools since the lay public could now perceive of public education as being a possibility. A revolution had occurred in educating large numbers of pupils for its day with the monitorial system of instruction.

Pupils in class four memorized syllables and words. An additive approach was used by Joseph Lancaster in adding a letter for each achievement level as pupils were promoted through the different class levels. Four letter words might be easy to master if these are meaningful words and relate directly to what can be seen and experienced in the concrete such as "wall," "ball," "call," "fall," and "hall." Syllables of four letters do provide for even more difficult learning in memorization as compared to the three letter syllables pupils mastered in class three. Thus, for example, syllables of four letters such as ough, augh, and ight, are spelled irregularly, not matching symbol and sound, and might well have diverse spellings for the same unit of sound. Non meaningful syllables truly represent the abstract and are separated from what is useful and the understandable.

Class five for pupils did away with the isolated syllables concept in teaching reading. Here, pupils were to master words containing five and six letters, such as "birds," "foxes," "snake," and "rides," (for five letter words), and "school," "tables," and "market" (for six letter words). When being promoted to class six, pupils would read from the New Testament or the Old Testament in the Bible. By this time, pupils had experienced selected basics in reading syllables and words whereby it was possible to read from a complex, abstract book such as the Bible. But, the leap from class five to class six must have been great indeed! Class seven emphasized pupils reading from both the New and the Old Testament, whereas in class eight, pupils read books to "improve the mind." These books included classical content, such as the classics in literature which had stood the test of time and space (Ediger, 1988, 2).

Lancaster advocated a correlated curriculum in that reading, writing, and spelling were taught as interrelated. Thus, the same words that pupils would learn to read in class one, for example, were to be mastered in spelling as well as in writing.

Joseph Lancaster based much of his educational thinking on what transpired in the home setting in that older children helped and assisted the younger ones. Thus, a master teacher is in charge of the entire school and the monitors are subordinates and teach the pupils in return in a monitorial school. John Sturm in the sixteenth century had one pupil assist ten others on learning in the school setting. The Cathedral School

at Rheims, France developed a system of instruction whereby one teacher was in charge of an entire school.A Reverend John Barnard of Marblehead, Massachusetts, in 1686, wrote in an autoblography that at age six, he had taught both older and younger children (Ediger, 1987, ERIC- ED 285838).

Influence of Lancaster on American Education

Lancaster did much to help bring on the American public school system. His methods of teaching were deemed good as compared to earlier approaches which basically stressed a one on one procedure in teaching pupils (See Eby and Arrowhead, 1934). Instead, Lancaster's methods stressed a one to one ratio with monitors to pupils. Inexpensive ways of teaching were emphasized with charts on the wall used to teach large numbers instead of textbooks for individual learners. Slates and sand were used for writing rather than paper and pencil. Monitors taught free and later with monitorial training did receive a small fee for their services. Monitorial training lead to normal schools for the education of teachers (Brubacher, 1966, 566-567) . Money has never been plenteous for schools even when the slogan was made in the 1980s that, "We don't throw money at education to solve problems."

Efficiency was very much in evidence for its day in that pupils marched with military precision from one chart to the next as stressed by monitors for their individual sets of ten pupils. These charts could be used for all 1,000, plus or minus, pupils in a building. A very rigid method of groping for instruction was then in evidence.

There are relevant beliefs in the thinking of Joseph Lancaster that were very progressive for its day:

1. individual differences were provided for, in part, by promoting learners to the next class level when it was deemed appropriate by the monitor.
2. a correlated curriculum was stressed whereby pupils would learn to read, spell, and write the same words when these were being emphasized in teaching.
3. sequential leanings were spelled out for pupils to experience as they progressed through the different class levels.
4. enthusiasm for new approaches in assisting pupils to achieve were in evidence.
5. a pioneer in teacher education advocated monitorial instruction for monitors of pupils
6. use of mentors in teaching, such as the master teacher supervising monitors, lead to teacher training (Ediger, 1974, 31-33).

Interest in the monitorial system was strong in this country in the

early part of the nineteenth century and is believed to have stimulated interest in public education (Knight and Hall, 1951, 133).

As is true of most trends in teaching, the monitorial system of instruction began to wane in the 1830s and came to an end in 1853, approximately. Horace Mann, first Secretary to the State Board of Education in Massachusetts from 1839-1852, wrote annual reports on his findings. The Seventh Annual Report (Mann, 1843) emphasized his trip in visiting Pestalozzi schools in Switzerland, among others. Mann wrote about the quality of Johann Henry Pestalozzi's object lessons in reading instruction whereby pupils learned to read about concrete objects observed in a rather direct manner. Thus, the concrete and the abstract became one and not separate entities. Mann's influence was great in Massachusetts as well as neighboring states. New educational ideas from Europe helped to bring on many changes in instruction of pupils in the United States.

Conclusion

Joseph Lancaster has a relevant place in the history of reading instruction as well as in bringing to the United States his monitorial system of instruction. Reading instruction became sequential in the eight steps of the curriculum as emphasized by Lancaster. Reading materials consisted of charts used and placed on the walls for all pupils in the monitorial school to be taught from. These charts represented an inexpensive way of teaching reading. The correlated reading curriculum with spelling and writing was relatively new for its day. Pupils taught in groups rather than individually on a continual basis assisted in more pupils becoming readers in the early eighteenth century. Many observers of the monitorial school commented on the efficiency and effectiveness in helping pupils learn to read at a time when only five per cent of the total population was literate.

Positive reinforcement was used in giving prizes to pupils who did well in reading. Individual differences in reading achievement were provided for with promoting a pupil from one class to another on a one by one basis.

The reader must remember that the Lancastrian monitorial system of instruction came to the United States in the early 1800s and had its historically based features. Disciplining of pupils was crude, but humane as compared to many teacher using "licking an learning procedures," especially in Colonial American Puritan schools. Lancaster stressed using methods of embarrassment as compared to physical punishment, such as yoking misbehaving pupils together to parade around the room with the many onlookers ridiculing the offenders.

With Lancaster's codification of sequence in reading instruction and accompanying methods used, the reading curriculum was able to be

evaluated and changes made to harmonize more with child growth and development characteristics. Thus, the following are trends used presently in the teaching of reading:

1. the controlled vocabulary. this approach has been minimized much, but was popular as late as the early 1980s.
2. rebus with its emphasis upon using pictures to replace complex words in print. Accuracy of pictures in the basals were difficult to come by.
3. Big Books with the teacher and pupils reading content together in order to stress sequence of ideas read as well as word identification stressed as the oral reading progresses in a cooperative manner.
4. predictable subject matter in which pupils may have a better chance to infer what the words in context are and attach meaning to content read.
5. rereading orally of stories with teacher and pupil involvement, using a Big Book.
6. peer reading and peer tutoring.
7. collaborative learning, individualized reading , and the language experience chart (Ediger, 1996, 221-225).
8. the connection of reading and writing, as well as reading across the curriculum (Ediger, 1999,, 3-11).
9. breathing life into what has been read through diverse forms of dramatic activities (See Ediger, 1997, 178-181).
10. philosophies of constructivism as well as high expectations from pupils emphasized in the teaching of reading (Ediger, 1998).

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